

**§ 650.3 Policy.**

(a) *NRCS mission.* The NRCS mission is to provide assistance that will allow use and management of ecological, cultural, natural, physical, social, and economic resources by striving for a balance between use, management, conservation, and preservation of the Nation's natural resource base. The NRCS mission is reemphasized and expanded to carry out the mandate of section 101(b) of NEPA, within other legislative constraints, in all its programs of Federal assistance. NRCS will continue to improve and coordinate its plans, functions, programs, and recommendations on resource use so that Americans, as stewards of the environment for succeeding generations—

(1) Can maintain safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings that support diversity of individual choices; and

(2) Are encouraged to attain the widest range of beneficial uses of soil, water, and related resources without degradation to the environment, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.

(b) *NRCS environmental policy.* NRCS is to administer Federal assistance within the following overall environmental policies:

(1) Provide assistance to Americans that will motivate them to maintain equilibrium among their ecological, cultural, natural, physical, social, and economic resources by striving for a balance between conserving and preserving the Nation's natural resource base.

(2) Provide technical and financial assistance through a systematic interdisciplinary approach to planning and decisionmaking to insure a balance between the natural, physical, and social sciences.

(3) Consider environmental quality equal to economic, social, and other factors in decisionmaking.

(4) Insure that plans satisfy identified needs and at the same time minimize adverse effects of planned actions on the human environment through interdisciplinary planning before providing technical and financial assistance.

(5) Counsel with highly qualified and experienced specialists from within and outside NRCS in many technical fields as needed.

(6) Encourage broad public participation in defining environmental quality objectives and needs.

(7) Identify and make provisions for detailed survey, recovery, protection, or preservation of unique cultural resources that otherwise may be irrevocably lost or destroyed by NRCS-assisted project actions, as required by Historic Preservation legislation and/or Executive Order.

(8) Encourage local sponsors to review with interested publics the operation and maintenance programs of completed projects to insure that environmental quality is not degraded.

(9) Advocate the retention of important farmlands and forestlands, prime rangeland, wetlands, or other lands designated by State or local governments. Whenever proposed conversions are caused or encouraged by actions or programs of a Federal agency, licensed by or require approval by a Federal agency, or are inconsistent with local or State government plans, provisions are to be sought to insure that such lands are not irreversibly converted to other uses unless other national interests override the importance of preservation or otherwise outweigh the environmental benefits derived from their protection. In addition, the preservation of farmland in general provides the benefits of open space, protection of scenery, wildlife habitat, and in some cases, recreation opportunities and controls on urban sprawl.

(10) Advocate actions that reduce the risk of flood loss; minimize effects of floods on human safety, health, and welfare; and restore and preserve the natural and beneficial functions and values of flood plains.

(11) Advocate and assist in the reclamation of abandoned surface-mined lands and in planning for the extraction of coal and other nonrenewable resources to facilitate restoration of the land to its prior productivity as mining is completed.

(12) Advocate the protection of valuable wetlands, threatened and endangered animal and plant species and

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their habitats, and designated ecosystems.

(13) Advocate the conservation of natural and manmade scenic resources to insure that NRCS-assisted programs or activities protect and enhance the visual quality of the landscape.

(14) Advocate and assist in actions to preserve and enhance the quality of the Nation's waters.

[44 FR 50579, Aug. 20, 1979; 44 FR 54981, Sept. 24, 1979]

### § 650.4 Definition of terms.

Definitions of the following terms or phrases appear in 40 CFR part 1508, CEQ regulations. These terms are important in the understanding and implementation of this rule. These definitions are not repeated in the interest of reducing duplication:

*Categorical exclusion.* (40 CFR 1508.4)

*Cooperating agency.* (40 CFR 1508.5)

*Cumulative impact.* (40 CFR 1508.7)

*Environmental impact statement (EIS).* (40 CFR 1508.11)

*Human environment.* (40 CFR 1508.14)

*Lead agency.* (40 CFR 1508.16)

*Major Federal action.* (40 CFR 1508.18)

*Mitigation.* (40 CFR 1508.20)

*NEPA process.* (40 CFR 1508.21)

*Scope.* (40 CFR 1508.25)

*Scoping.* (40 CFR 1501.7)

*Tiering.* (40 CFR 1508.28)

(a) *Channel realignment.* Channel realignment includes the construction of a new channel or a new alignment and may include the clearing, snagging, widening, and/or deepening of the existing channel. (Channel Modification Guidelines, 43 FR 8276).

(b) *Environmental assessment (EA).* (40 CFR 1508.9)

(1) An environmental assessment is a concise public document for which a Federal agency is responsible that—

(i) Briefly provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact.

(ii) Aids an agency's compliance with the Act when no environmental impact statement is necessary.

(iii) Facilitates preparation of an environmental impact statement when one is necessary.

(2) An environmental assessment includes brief discussions of the need for

the proposal, alternatives as required by section of the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, and a list of agencies and persons consulted.

(c) *Environmental evaluation.* The environmental evaluation (EE) (formerly referred to by NRCS as an environmental assessment) is the part of planning that inventories and estimates the potential effects on the human environment of alternative solutions to resource problems. A wide range of environmental data together with social and economic information is considered in determining whether a proposed action is a major Federal action significantly affecting the human environment. The environmental evaluation for a program, regulation, or individual action is used to determine the need for an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement. It also aids in the consideration of alternatives and in the identification of available resources.

(d) *Federally-assisted actions.* These actions are planned and carried out by individuals, groups, or local units of government largely on nonfederal land with technical and/or financial assistance provided by NRCS.

(e) *Interdisciplinary planning.* NRCS uses an interdisciplinary environmental evaluation and planning approach in which specialists and groups having different technical expertise act as a team to jointly evaluate existing and future environmental quality. The interdisciplinary group considers structure and function of natural resource systems, complexity of problems, and the economic, social, and environmental effects of alternative actions. Public participation is an essential part of effective interdisciplinary planning. Even if an NRCS employee provides direct assistance to an individual land user, the basic data used is a result of interdisciplinary development of guide and planning criteria.